

MEMBERSHIP PUBLICATION

A VIEW FROM THE LOFT

Ask the Coach

by **Rosanne Bane**

Loft Teaching Artist and Creativity Coach Rosanne Bane answers questions from students.

Hi Rosanne,

One of my biggest challenges as a writer is following through with what I start. Most days, I look over what I wrote the day before and think, This idea is dumb; I'd better start something else. As a result, I start something new every day or two and never let myself fully explore an idea.

I know I need to accept the whole "sh*tty first drafts" concept, but it's more than just the fear of bad writing. No matter what I start, I decide the idea itself isn't worth investing the time and I abandon it before I give it a fair chance.

Maybe the answer is as simple as ignoring the Saboteur in my head and forcing myself to stick with what I've started, which is easier said than done. That Saboteur is big, nasty, and very powerful. [Note: Rosanne defines the Saboteur in her classes as the harsh inner critic that undermines our goals.] —Mark Z.

Hi Mark,

Like you said, the solution is simple, but not easy: refuse to let the Saboteur run and ruin your writing life. Stay with an idea from beginning to end, not because it's a great idea, but just for the practice of it. Developing ideas is just as much a learned skill as crafting sentences and

seedlings that look too weak and spindly to support the flowers or vegetables we hope to grow, early writing never has the strength to support all the ideas and emotions you want to express.



You simply cannot judge a seed or seedling by what a mature plant is supposed to look like. You cannot judge an idea or a piece of writing in its early developmental stages by what fully developed writing is capable of. Gardeners and farmers have to learn what "normal" looks like for different kinds of seeds and seedlings at one week, one month, three months, and so on. You have to learn what "normal" looks like for an idea or piece of writing at different stages of development. I suspect you don't know what a good idea looks like in the early stages because you've been judging your ideas by a standard that simply doesn't apply and you've never let an idea grow to full development.

So, to help you shut the Saboteur up, notice when you're judging your ideas and simply remind yourself that you are not qualified to judge. Say something like "I can't judge whether this idea is good or not yet. I'm not qualified to judge this idea. I am only qualified to develop this idea."

Eventually, you might learn to evaluate ideas earlier, but until then, you, like the rest of us, will have to take the risk of nurturing ideas that



paragraphs. You, like every other writer, need to practice this skill.

You might want to consider taking the "Idea Intensive" class with Sarah Tieck.

You might also want to ask yourself how you would recognize a great, or even good, idea when you saw one. What does a good idea look like? What does an idea have to have or do to make you think it's worth investing time in? Could any idea have what you're looking for in the early stages?

One metaphor that works for me is that ideas have a gestation period like seeds. When you plant a seed and water it, it looks like nothing is happening for days. If gardeners and farmers decided seeds weren't worth watering anymore because the seeds showed no signs of growing yet, we'd never grow anything (except maybe dandelions, which seem to spring up fully formed overnight). And just like

may turn out to be less than stellar despite how much we've invested in them. Novice gardeners have to let a few weeds grow until they can clearly distinguish weeds from seedling carrots or parsnips or whatever. And unlike gardening, you may find out that *any* idea can be developed into something worthwhile when you allow the idea to grow and morph.

—Rosanne Bane

If you're a Loft student with a question about your writing process, you can contact Rosanne at Rosanne@RosanneBane.com. Rosanne teaches "The Writing Habit," "Writer's Resistance," "Entering the Flow," and other classes at the Loft. She is the author of *Dancing in the Dragon's Den: Rekindling the Creative Fire in Your Shadow* and more than 100 short pieces in a variety of publications. For clips of her work or more information, visit www.RosanneBane.com.

“Coaching with Rosanne was the best thing I did for myself while writing my thesis. Rosanne taught me a writing process I will carry forward. She helped me place my writing in the context of my values and inspired me to enjoy the challenge.”

- Kathy Draeger, Ph.D.



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